



DHS Matters!

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Submit stories by e-mail to DHS-Newsletter@michigan.gov

Fields of dreams

From Julie Wiles
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Foster families from Eaton and Ingham counties enjoyed a fun-filled day with the Lansing Lugnuts on July 27 (the Lugnuts are Lansing's minor league professional baseball team.)

Tyler Curtis, a representative of the Lansing Lugnuts, set up extra activities for foster youths' play two hours before the game (see inset photo right.) There were clowns for face painting, balloons, drawing, and other structured events.

Just before the game, two foster youths were given the opportunity to throw the first pitches. When Michael, 4, threw his pitch, the announcer said, "Every child needs a hero, be a foster parent."

When Travis, 15, threw out his pitch, the announcer said, "Be a part of the solution, foster a teen." More than 200 children and family members attended this event.

The event was generously paid for by two area organizations dedicated to foster children – Capital Area Community Foundation and Caring About Kids.

Tanya Bryanton-Belding from Ingham DHS, along with **Julie Wiles** and **Keith Behm** from Eaton County DHS, staffed a table with information for anyone interested in becoming a foster parent. The Eaton County foster parent, adoptive, and kinship support group had a banner on the table that read, "Every child needs a hero, become a foster parent."

Throughout the game more announcements were made including, "Anyone who would like to have information on becoming a foster parent, go to the information table located out back by the kids activities." We had brochures with upcoming Pride training dates and many interested people picked up information on becoming foster parents. We also had kinship brochures for two grandparents caring for their grandchildren.

At the end of the game, which unfortunately the Lugnuts lost, the children were able to go out and run the bases. Going to see a ball game makes for a wonderful family activity. Seeing the children's smiling faces is the best recruitment tool ever!



During a Lansing Lugnuts outing in July (inset photo) the Eaton County foster parent, adoptive, and kinship support group had a banner on the table that said, "Every child needs a hero, become a foster parent." The day featured foster care and adoption promotions and two foster youths threw out the first pitches.

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Kristi Barron and Taryn Francisco of Newaygo County DHS with some of the 100-plus children's car seats they are giving away to clients. They acquired the seats through a local fundraising effort.



A community boost for kids in cars

From Renee Rosema
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Three Newaygo County DHS staff, eligibility specialist **Diane Bevins**, home aide **Kristi Barron** and ITT **Taryn Francisco**, wanted to find a way to extend "Casual for a Cause" days throughout the summer months in Newaygo County. They negotiated with local director **Jim McCormick** and asked what it would take. He said the rules were simple: it had to be something everyone could participate in and it had to give something back to the community. While Newaygo and Lake counties have had Casual for a Cause for years, going casual for the entire summer had to be meaningful.

Kristi, who is a certified child passenger safety technician through Safe Kids Michigan (see their Web site at <http://www.MichiganSafeKids.org>) knew Michigan's law was about to change and children who were under 8 years of age and not yet 4 feet 9 inches tall would be required to be transported in booster seats. The group planned how to fund the project and received a matching grant from the Fremont Area Community Foundation. Staff voluntarily charged \$60 for their summer casual days and raised \$3,000. EvenFlo, which has a discount program for Safe Kids Coalitions, provided more than 100 high-back and low-back booster seats at a discount price. They are available at no charge to existing Newaygo County DHS clients as long as they cooperate in having the seat properly installed by staff.

The Newaygo Michigan State Police post and the Newaygo County sheriff's department were also alerted so their road patrol staff could refer DHS recipients to the office to receive a seat as a means of complying with the law. Lake County staff are also participating, with their funds being donated to St. Anne's Food Bank in Baldwin. Bottom line: staff are comfortable and clients receive enhanced services – a win-win for all!

Lapeer voter registration outreach at Family Fun Fair

From Karen Foster
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It was sunny and 90 degrees on the Lapeer County Courthouse lawn as hundreds of children and their caregivers visited the Family Fun Fair on July 16. Lapeer DHS and 20 other agencies offered recreational activities for children at the event. At the Lapeer DHS booth **Karen Foster** and volunteer **Frieda Fetting** offered children an opportunity to decorate bookmarks or greeting cards. While their children were busy, we offered caregivers (mostly parents) information about DHS services and the opportunity to register to vote. We also offered Food Assistance outreach and recruited foster parents. Several hundred children participated in the craft activity, while there was direct contact with 69 adults regarding whether they wished to register to vote.



Frieda Fetting

Vocational education: a start on the road to employment

From Jeremiah L. Hoover
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Youths that leave Shawono Center have addressed most of the issues that landed them with us. They depart here for halfway houses, foster care, a return home, or to another placement. Some need to find and keep a job and many have not had work experience beyond this program. We help by providing a vocational component to our programs. The vocational education program at Shawono is based on preparing youths to get and keep their first jobs, to help prevent recidivism, and to provide them with some real-life skills. Resources are limited; a visit room acts as a classroom, while hallways and grounds supply the "workshop" for projects and tasks. The youths report to work after lunch and are responsible to be ready at that time. The teacher acts as educator, supervisor and (when needed) an extra pair of hands.

The janitorial class introduces students to floor waxing, grounds and building maintenance and organization. Job safety is always a part of daily instruction. The youths learn responsibility to a job, themselves and society. They learn skills they can take into a competitive job market. They pay off some or all of their restitution before they are released. The youths leave feeling capable of securing a job, relieved that they have paid their restitution debt off or down, and have money in their pocket. Vocational education is often viewed with a jaundiced eye. But the fact is that we see youths that leave here are going to go into jobs where they will need the basic skills of cleaning, following a schedule, complying with authority, and having to work at a job while completing school, working on their GED, or attending community college.

■ Shawono Center is a medium secure juvenile justice facility with 40-bed treatment program with two general groups, one sex offender treatment group, and one reintegration group. It is licensed for males age 12-20. A sample syllabus, student time sheet, and other materials are available from the author for review on request.

World

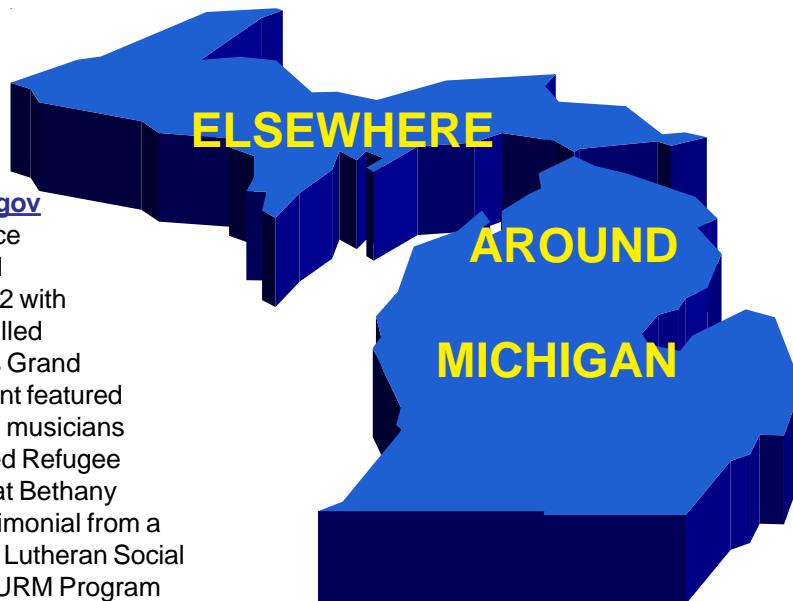
Refugee Day

From Pat Weaver
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DHS Refugee Assistance Program honored World Refugee Day on June 12 with an activity- and music-filled celebration in Lansing's Grand Tower Building. The event featured Burmese refugee youth musicians from the Unaccompanied Refugee Minor Program (URM) at Bethany Christian Services; testimonial from a Sudanese refugee from Lutheran Social Services of Michigan's URM Program Jacob Atem; a "Reverse ESL" (English as a second language) class led by Ariel Rodriguez-Pena and Betty Akinyi Okwako of the Refugee Development Center; and a mini-citizenship test conducted by Rachel Mays of the DHS program staff. DHS Director **Ismael Ahmed** addressed the gathering and refreshments were catered by the refugee-owned business of The Daily Bagel in downtown Lansing. The event was well attended by Grand Tower employees and other guests including staff from Bethany Christian Services in Grand Rapids, St. Vincent's Catholic Charities in Lansing, and Lutheran Social Services in Detroit and Lansing. Program staff that assisted in the event include program director **Al Horn**, **Jocelyn Vanda**, **Rachel Mays**, **Sarah Roach**, **Lill Lane**, **Pam Olson**, **Dawn Arwood**, **Pat Weaver** and **Mike Luea**.



Left: Burmese refugee youth musicians perform during World Refugee Day celebration June 12.



Employee appreciation week in Lafayette District

From Angie Jenerette
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During the week of June 16-20, our management team hosted Lafayette's Employee Appreciation Week. The event started Monday with a sign that greeted employees, "Lafayette Workers are Spectacular!" The employees were then treated to a continental breakfast and games held during breaks and

lunch. A "taboo tournament" (a form of charades) continued through the week with staff champions fondly known as "Queens and One King." Wayne DHS Director **Dwayne Haywood** visited on Monday and met staff.

Team activities dominated the week. Each day was designated a color and staff members were encouraged to incorporate that color into their dress. Wednesday was movie day and a pizza lunch with salad was provided. The grand finale on Friday was a wonderful barbecue with hot dogs, hamburgers, chicken wings, a number of salads, baked beans, chips, pop and cake for dessert. The theme was a beach party held at the "Lafayette Beach." People played Frisbee, beach balls and other games in the parking lot. **Patricia Smith**, director of the Wayne DHS Financial Assistance Administration-West, visited Lafayette during the barbecue. The event was a huge success and great morale booster.



Mason County DHS employees planted a tree to celebrate the life of their late coworker, Joette Howard (inset photo).

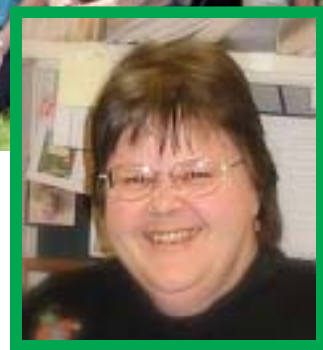
Mason County DHS says farewell

From Bonnie Pfefferle, Office Manager, and Randy Butters, Program Manager

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Mason County DHS staff, friends, and family members joined together to plant and dedicate a flowering crabapple tree in the memory of **Ms. Joette Howard** on June 18. Ms. Howard, age 60, of Ludington, passed away unexpectedly on the morning of May 1. Joette, a native of Jackson, Mich., began her career with DHS as a general office clerk in Jackson County in April 1986 and later transferred to Mason County in 1990 as a bookkeeping clerk. She was promoted to eligibility specialist after the state's 1997 early retirement program. Joette served as chief union steward for many years and was a strong supporter of women's shelters and domestic violence programs in Mason County. Not having a family of her own, Joette considered those she worked with as her family and she will be missed by all of us here at Mason County DHS. In memory of Joette, a silent auction was held with all proceeds going to C.O.V.E., the local women's shelter in Ludington. C.O.V.E. is an acronym for Communities Overcoming Violent Encounters.



An AmeriCorps volunteer at work in June.

AmeriCorps volunteers revitalize Benton Harbor

From Elyse Ver Berkmoes, Communications Specialist

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More than 250 current Michigan's AmeriCorps members from all over the state focused on rejuvenating Benton Harbor's community June 11-12. As part of the 2008 Russ Mawby Signature Service Project, AmeriCorps members applied their service skills at Harbor Habitat for Humanity housing sites in the Crystal Estates neighborhood. Projects included landscaping, building sheds, constructing sub-floors, and framing.

The 2008 Signature Service Project was a partnership between Michigan's AmeriCorps, Habitat for Humanity of Michigan, and Harbor Habitat for Humanity. It is an annual event serving a different community each year. Michigan's AmeriCorps is a program of the Michigan Community Service Commission, a state agency that is part of DHS and helps strengthen communities by building a culture of service. For more information about the 2008 Signature Service Project or Michigan's AmeriCorps, visit www.michigan.gov/mcsc.

DHS Matters! is a product of Michigan's Department of Human Services
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